

2.A OASDI: Benefit Computation & Automatic Adjustments

Table 2.A18.—Automatic adjustment provisions

Act	Adjustment of—	Provision
1972a	Benefits	Under the original provisions (based on the 1972a, 1973a, and 1973b Acts), the arithmetical mean of the CPI for January, February, and March in the year of determination was compared with the arithmetical mean of the CPI for the later of (a) January, February, and March of the year in which the last effective cost-of-living increase was established or (b) the 3 months of the calendar quarter in which the effective month of the last general benefit increase occurred. (Before the introduction, in 1977, of the alternative CPI series for “All Urban Consumers,” or the CPI-U, the CPI-W was referred to as the CPI.) If the percentage increase in the CPI, rounded to the nearest one-tenth of 1 percent, was at least 3.0 (the triggering requirement), a cost-of-living benefit increase was established and the level of benefits increased by the same percentage, effective for June of the year in which the determination was made.
1983		<p>The 1983 Act moved the effective date for a cost-of-living benefit increase from June to December, beginning in 1983, and eliminated the “triggering requirement” for the 1983 increase only. Effective with the determination made in 1984, the two periods used in calculating the CPI-W percentage increase were shifted from the first to the third quarter.</p> <p>The 1983 Act also introduced an alternative method for determining the size of a cost-of-living adjustment. This method, called the stabilizer provision, is applied when the ratio of the combined OASDI Trust Fund assets to estimated outgo falls below a certain percentage. The “triggering” percentage is 15 percent for the years 1985-88 and 20 percent for years after 1988. Under these circumstances, the cost-of-living adjustment is based on the lesser of the CPI-W percentage increase determined above or the increase in average wages. The latter increase is the percentage, rounded to the nearest one-tenth of 1 percent, by which the national average wage for the year before the year of determination exceeds the average wage for the year before the most recent year in which either a cost-of-living increase or a general benefit increase occurred (see column 2 in table 2.A8 for the annual amount of the average wage after 1950 and footnote 1 in table 2.A8 for the underlying data sources.)</p> <p>The 1983 legislation also included a provision for making up any benefit increases that are based on a lower wage increase rather than on the increase in the cost of living. When the fund ratio is greater than 32 percent, additional increases will be provided so that benefits are increased to the level at which they would have been if all increases had been based on the CPI-W. (See table 2.A19 for the cumulative effect of statutory and automatic increases in benefits.)</p>
1986		Triggering requirement eliminated for cost-of-living increases in and after 1986 by P. L. 99-509 (signed Oct. 21, 1986).
1972a	Maximum amount of taxable and creditable earnings	<p>The 1972a Act (as modified by the 1973a and 1973b Act) mandated a determination in 1974, and in every subsequent year in which a cost-of-living benefit increase is established, as to whether or not an adjustment is required in the maximum amount of annual earnings that will be taxed and credited toward benefits.</p> <p>The determination in the years after 1975 is made by multiplying the “maximum” in effect in the year of determination by the following quotient: the national average wage for the year before the year of determination, divided by the average wage for the year before the most recent year in which an automatic determination was made that resulted in an increase or in which an increase in the maximum was enacted. (See column 2 in table 2.A8 for annual amounts of the average wage after 1950.) The resulting product, rounded to the nearest multiple of \$300, is the new maximum amount of taxable and creditable earnings, effective with respect to remuneration paid after the year of determination and with respect to taxable years beginning after that year. In no case, however, is the maximum reduced to an amount below the maximum in the year of determination.</p>
1976		In the 1974 and 1975 determinations the quotient was the average wage for the year of determination, estimated from data for the first calendar quarter, divided by the corresponding amount for the year before the year of determination. P. L. 94-202 (signed Jan. 2, 1976) revised the adjustment method by increasing by a year the lag in average wages used in the computation. Thus, for example, the 1976 determination was based on the percentage increase in the average wage from 1974 to 1975.
1977		Statutory in lieu of automatic increases in the maximum instituted for the years 1979, 1980, and 1981. Also, for purposes of establishing a “year of coverage” used in the computation of the special minimum PIA, annual maximum taxable and creditable earnings after 1978 are the amounts that would have been determined under the automatic adjustment provisions if the statutory increases in the maximum under the 1977 Act had not been enacted (see table 2.A12).

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Table 2.A18.—Automatic adjustment provisions —*Continued*

Act	Adjustment of—	Provision
1989		Automatic increases in the maximum for 1990, 1991, and 1992 determined under a transitional rule, specified by the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1989, for computing “deemed” average annual wage for 1988, 1989, and 1990. The purpose of the legislation was to include contributions to certain “deferred compensation” plans, most importantly sections 401(k) pension plans, in the average annual average wage.
1994a		The determination for years after 1994 is made by multiplying \$60,600, the “maximum” for 1994, by the following quotient: the national average wage index for the year before the year in which the determination is made, divided by the national average wage index for 1992. (See column 2 in table 2.A8 for annual amounts of the national average wage index.) The resulting product, rounded to the nearest \$300, is the new maximum amount of taxable and creditable earnings, effective with respect to remuneration paid in (and taxable years beginning in) the year following the year the determination is made. In no case, however, is the new maximum reduced to an amount below the maximum in the year of determination.
1977	Quarter of coverage	Mandatory annual determination, beginning in 1978, as to whether or not an adjustment is required in the amount of wages and self-employment earnings an individual needs in order to be credited with a quarter of coverage in the succeeding year. The amount required for a quarter of coverage is the product of \$250 (in effect in 1978) multiplied by the following quotient: the national average wage for the year before the year of determination, divided by the average wage for 1976 (see column 2 in table 2.A8 for average annual wages after 1950). The resulting product, rounded to the nearest multiple of \$10, is the new amount required for a quarter coverage. In no case, however, is the new amount reduced below the amount in effect in the year of determination.
1977	Bend points in PIA formula and maximum family benefit formula	New benefit computation method based on average indexed monthly earnings (AIME) after 1950, effective for workers first eligible after 1978. Provision for automatic adjustment of the dollar amounts, or bend points, defining (1) the AIME brackets in the PIA formula (see table 2.A11) and (2) the PIA brackets in the maximum family benefit formula (see table 2.A13). New bend points are established by multiplying the bend points in effect in 1979—\$180 and \$1,085 for the PIA formula and \$230, \$332, and \$433 for the maximum family benefit formula—by the following quotient: the national average wage for the second year before the year for which the determination was made, divided by the average wage for 1977 (see column 2 in table 2.A8 for average annual wages after 1950). The resulting products, rounded to the nearest dollar, are the new bend points.
1980		Modified maximum family benefit formula applicable to workers with initial entitlement to disability benefits in or after July 1980 (see table 2.A14). New formula for disabled workers has no bend points subject to automatic adjustment.
1972b	Earnings test	The 1972b Act (as modified by the 1973a and 1973b Acts) mandated a determination in 1974, and in every subsequent year in which a cost-of-living increase is established, as to whether or not an adjustment in the exempt amount—the amount of earnings permitted without reduction in benefits—is required. The determination in the years after 1975 is made by multiplying the monthly exempt amount in effect in the year of determination by the following quotient: the national average wage for the year before the year of determination, divided by the average wage for the year before the most recent year in which an automatic determination was made that resulted in an increase or in which an increase in the exempt amount was enacted. (See column 2 in table 2.A8 for annual amounts of the average wage after 1950.) The resulting product, rounded to the nearest multiple of \$10, is the new monthly exempt amount, effective with respect to remuneration paid after the year of determination and with respect to taxable year beginning after that year. In no case, however, is the new exempt amount reduced below the exempt amount in the year of determination. The new annual exempt amount is determined by multiplying the new monthly amount by 12.
1976		In the 1974 and 1975 determinations the quotient was the average wage for the year of determination, estimated from data for the first calendar quarter, divided by the corresponding amount for the year before the year of determination. P. L. 94-202 (signed Jan. 2, 1976) revised the adjustment method by increasing by a year the lag in average wages used in the computation. Thus, for example, the 1976 determination was based on the percentage increase in the average wage from 1974 to 1975.
1994a		The determination for years after 1994 is made by multiplying the monthly exempt amounts in effect for 1994 (\$930 for beneficiaries who have, \$670 for beneficiaries who have not yet, reached “normal retirement age”—see footnote 6 in table 2.A29) by the following quotient: the national average wage index for the year before the year in which the determination is made, divided by the national average wage index for 1992. (See column 2 in table 2.A8 for annual amounts of the national average wage index.) The resulting products, rounded to the nearest \$10, are the new monthly exempt amounts effective for the year following the year the determination is made. The new annual exempt amounts are determined by multiplying the new monthly amounts by 12.

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Table 2.A18.—Automatic adjustment provisions —*Continued*

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1996		P.L. 104-121, enacted March 29, 1996, suspended the automatic indexing of the exempt amounts through the year 2002 for workers aged 65-69. It legislated “ad hoc” increases in the annual exempt amounts to \$12,500 in 1996; \$13,500 in 1997; \$14,500 in 1998; \$15,500 in 1999; \$17,000 in 2000; \$25,000 in 2001; and \$30,000 in 2002. Thereafter, the exempt amounts will increase automatically based on the annual increase in the national average wage index as under the 1994 legislation.